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The Last Memorial of Bronisław Piłsudski

The seven page typescript memorial of Bronisław Piłsudski was referred to by some of his biographers as a political testament what aimed at raising the importance of this document. This specific summary of Piłsudski's socio-political views was written in that last weeks of his life and is dated May 3, 1918. There is reference to the successors of the May 3rd Constitution that is much cherished by the Polish people, "in addition to being formulated under very critical moments" – Piłsudski expected that it is presumably the last anniversary experienced under a foreign yoke for an opportunity to prove "good will and the ability to create collective work". The date for this memorial was specifically emphatic.

He addressed this to representatives of the Paris colony which he knew personally as people of good will and merit. The Zamoyskis were among them too. The memorial was handwritten addressed. That was flimsy, blue carbon paper. The readability of the text is clear and there are fountain pen handwritten amendments that have been added by the author's own hand which is suggested by the handwriting and ink color.

The feedback on the document was not enthusiastic, as it could not be. On the same day, Dr. Jan Danysz replied to the author: "I read your beautiful statement, but how come one can make this true?". The skepticism expressed in this letter (which was heightened by the changing emotions of the ailing Piłsudski,) placed doubts on further distribution of the memorial which could have made an impression of being a

“sentimental graphomania”¹. Inevitably, Piłsudski’s memorial reached some people including Dr. Henryk Gierżyński and Kazimierz Woźnicki. The copy received by Jan Rozwadowski had a handwritten date of May 7, 1918² meaning that Piłsudski, despite recorded doubts, did not refrain from distribution of the material. Some copies circulated without any specific addressees. At the Kórnik Library, there are still original copies (with Piłsudski’s handwritten amendments) that are missing addressees’ names.

The appeal which was addressed primarily to the Polish people in Paris, is “a scream of pain and exhortation that is worth the one of Skarga”³ according to Jan Rozwadowski, Piłsudski’s superior and friend. One can think that skepticism, which was a rather expected and evident lack of positive response to the initiative important to the author’s philosophy of life, became the prevailing factor that determined his suicidal death a few days later. Such association is not a new one. Mrs. General Zamoyski noted on the memorial text that she received: “Mr. Piłsudski sent me this writing in the first half of May 1918 and on May 17th he was already dead. He was laid to rest in Montmorency on May 29th”.

There are texts of this memorial together with copies (without addressees) of Bronisław Piłsudski’s handwritten amendments at the Kórnik Library of Polish Science Academy (ref. BK 7738); Extracts are quoted by i.a. A. Kuczyński, *Bronisław Piłsudski – czyli sztuka służenia ludziom i nauce. Szkic do portretu, “Niepodległość”* Vol. XLV: 1992, pp. 214-215 and H. Florkowska-Francic, *Ostatnie lata...*, p. 207 ff; an entire memorial was published by S. Sierpowski in: *The Kórnik Library Memoirs*, vol. 27, 2005, pp. 52-56.

**To Honorable Mrs. General Countess J[adwiga] Zamoyski and Her Esteemed
Children, Countess M[aria] Zamoyski and Count W[ładysław] Zamoyski**

¹ Cf. H. Florkowska-Frančić, *Ostatnie lata Bronisława Piłsudskiego (1915-1918). Switzerland - Paris*. [in:] *Bronisław Piłsudski (1866-1918). Człowiek – Uczony – Patriot*. Zakopane, 2003, p. 204 ff.

² A. Kuczyński, *Bronisław Piłsudski – czyli sztuka służenia ludziom i nauce. Szkic do portretu. „Niepodległość”*, Vol. XLV:1992, p. 213.

³ A. Kuczyński, *Gdy nastał kres życia. Nowe materiały dotyczące śmierci Bronisława Piłsudskiego. „Lud”*, Vol. 26:2002, p. 269.

All nations which suffered from the major and connate disaster, earthquake, flooding, etc. or threatened its existence by any savage and external force under instinct of self-preservation, exposed great catchwords of unity, persistence and self help. At the same time, they abandoned all minor dissonances and misunderstandings either between individuals, families, clans or bigger formations.

Even that pagan folks, who were not ablaze with big but gentle Christian light of faith, in such situations, demonstrated subordinate natural feelings of unkindness against very antithetic types verses mutual solidarity and willingness to a common defense against hostile forces.

Christian nations and states, in different situations of universal misery, let bygones stayed bygones even the most significant offences against divine or human law, defense of the endangered whole, and the existence of future generations, nominated the thieves and assassins that were preoccupied with the thought of an all-embracing salvation, occasionally demonstrated evidence that the spark of god was never muted in human hearts. Thanks to its acknowledgement and respect, this proved that they are capable of the same commitments and high-minded cooperation, that in extraordinary times, would be provided by normal, noble individuals that never got out of the path adopted morality.

Polish nations (or rather the nations which our great and dear Republic of Poland consisted of) were sometimes, now more than before, in such a dangerous position for the extended period of time. However some hopes in regards to changes in the fate of our Mother Country are still great. Questions still remain curious to know if this was because of aroused hopes to recreate a united and independent Republic. Sometimes tormenting, there is danger in the air around whether or not other districts will remain in captivity and mourning. We must not recede too early and must mobilize all national forces in order to be justified to future generations that we did whatever possible and tried all possible ways to again enter nations' coexistence as free and equal to others.

Among different systems of national and political labor, we still miss the factor which offends others and harms our own matters – the consent.

Obviously there is never absolute consent in any nation however our disagreement reaches glaring extravagant levels. This is not a constant national feature, as some countries with unfavorable formations see it this way. Some easily justify themselves as

not really willing to truly support our issues and others justify the harm we experienced from them with the necessity of demonstrating supervisory attention for us. This comparative and petrifying puissance and disagreements, since all human traits can be evaluated on the comparative basis only, result from our long-term captivity. They can even stem from the period when the Republic has started to weaken and become dependent upon their neighbors.

Our famed “*Liberum Veto*” resulted from the liveliness of the nation, the internal sense of strength and ability to bring public issues to unanimous solutions, and finally, from the belief that wellbeing of our Mother Country will always be of the highest priority to all.

Lloyd Gorge, one of the most talented British statesmen and currently leading in public and state life, expressed in one of his speeches on September 1917 that: “unity in operation does not require freedom to be abolished or suppressed. On the contrary, unity is the highest form of freedom”.

Preparing for such a free life and restoration of ancient but beautiful traditions, which attracted so many surrounding societies, we have to sincerely admit that external factors of collective life can easily slip out of our hands if we do not abandon all habits that form themselves in the broken, subdued, repression tired society and with our invaders trying to systematically and insidiously enforce in order to facilitate its position as a ruler or even benefactor for one slightly persecuted class or nation.

In the upbringing process of their nations, the German people employed the rule: “*das ist die gute Wissenschaft, die gute Mensschafft*” which in our case articulated into “*das ist die gute Wissenschaft, die gute Sklayenschaft*”. Russia, applying the same rules in a much more dirty and horrible way, employed them to create servile subjects within their monstrously vast country both with respect to the tamed folk and to their own people, thus injecting us with another dirty, servile feature.

There were a number of sad and harmful faults to our public welfare stemming from this captivity, such as: notably widespread selfishness, exorbitant ambitiousness, jealousy, lack of mutual respect, inability to comply with distinctiveness of types and views, excessive resentments for every breach or action distinctness, ease to bow to all external forces, lack civil courage, fearfulness, or on the contrary, excessive, malicious criticism and bravado unbridled by thoughtfulness. All these are features constantly and

helplessly cry out for team work, both in the small cluster and minor objectives and in bigger organizations and major tasks.

Obviously this criticism, which is sometimes excessive as in every nation, stems from the great willingness to repair and remove all this evil in the collective life which can be eliminated or tempered. These defects undoubtedly exist in other societies, even those who are completely free politically, since typically we live in a period where during upbringing, less attention is put on the culture of character building than before. Therefore our mind is overloaded and in turn, due to the rapid rate of life, causes neurasthenia and lack of equilibrium. However, the nation must think about itself and facilitate its wandering around the earth.

It can be trusted that one of the very first tasks put in front of reborn Poland would be a great concern about the physical and moral education of future generations. Apart from this however, the generation that will experience both periods of homeland in shackles and one already set free for this great happiness that fell on their lot must also suffer some burden of not only material, but also moral. One of the greatest scarifies will be the necessity to curb habits; and character exuberance, which go alongside of the possibility of single life or working with a few more adjusted individuals that force themselves to cooperate within a bigger group (with very distinct and not always kind people) based on the great keynote of life's compromise which allows for collective co-existence.

This rule, already forgiving in the years of small scale strenuous work of a nation taken into captivity, is again in our minds and hearts seen though various efforts of gathering all social factors a single national workroom even though they would only fight with each other so far. Some of the most readable examples are: manifesto of the united associations of the Kingdom of Poland in February 1918, claiming e.g. withdrawal of the foreign troops; Kosciuszko uprising celebration in Poznań; declaration as of May 1917 of all Polish political parties from the Galicia region; memorial also as of May 1917 of Polish united factions in Lithuania (several joint appeals to Lithuania can be expected from all Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian people); and finally, the opposition of all Polish associations in Rus' against unfair forfeiture of goods.

Only Polish people living out of their mother country were protected against the more severe distress as they were not yet jolted and were worried too little about the most important objectives of the moment.

The big day of May 3rd has approached. That is probably the last anniversary celebrated under the foreign yoke giving us scattered descendants of the founders of the May 3rd Constitution also created during critical moments which has brought us closer to the possibility to prove our good will and creative collective work capabilities.

One can experience the existence, within numerous Polish colonies living here, one of the most important necessities on foreign land. The necessity to highlight the willingness to act jointly and severally as well as to demonstrate to all who are so very interested in our destiny and ourselves, that if we are not able to help each other in our national endeavors, then we are at least able to not disturb each other.

Thus, I allow myself to address a few local colony representatives, personally known to me as people of good will and merit, with the request to initiate the actions that would prove that all our aspirations to a national force consolidation will be deeply felt so they can be granted at this outpost of real solid dimension.

At the same time, I would like to apologize to all, who after reading my appeal, would not like to undertake any efforts aimed at bringing our collective lives to a more higher and European level.

In my defense, I must admit, it hurts me a lot when the other emphasizes our defects as living 19 years outside the Motherland. I use to idealize and defend it against all external critics. On the other hand, I belong to the Polish people from Lithuania and I know very well how much the manifestation of excessive puissance is harmful to the aspirations of a renewed Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. All of our efforts and internal consolidation though, are weakened by the externally whispered separatism of the Lithuanian (linguistic) and Belarusian people.

Under the influence of strong emotional factors, I believe my thoughts, regardless of its form, will find its hearing in the hearts of fellow countrymen experienced by life and those reverently thinking about the future of Great Poland. Thus, I do ask them to take the initiative in terms of relaying the message within all nationally affected organizations and individuals, and to discuss common issues including settling mutual relations.

Personally, let me, having already some supporters in the Motherland, give you my practical view in creating a League of understanding (reconciliation, kindness, or so on – never mind the name) with honorable tribunal, pledging the objectivity of judgments to serve on the parties requests or to take the initiative to mitigate, improve, or provide life, in general, with harmony and joy, and in the particular life of rebuilding our Motherland!

With due respect and regards,

sincerely yours

M. Ginét Piłsudski

May 3, 1918, Paris

/Postscript of Jadwiga Zamoyska:

Mr. Piłsudski sent me this letter in the first half of May 1918 – on May 17th he was already dead. He was lied to rest on May 29th in Montmorency

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